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CURRENT EDUCATIONAL LITERATURE

The Educational Law of Reading and Writing. By HORACE E. SCUDDER. The Atlantic Monthly, February, 1894.

Dogberry says, "To be a well-favored man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature." The world has half believed that he hit upon an educational truth. Why all this labor over pen and reading book?

In Björnson's story, A Happy Boy, the little Örjvind is at home in the world of nature. His mother is his companion and interprets to him the voices of nature. She teaches him to read books which he had been waiting to hear "when they talk." Happy is the child who lives so near to nature—so alive to nature that, when he passes to books, he find in them living voices, responsive notes. In childhood and youth the imagination should be fostered not stifled. Reading aloud to them from the poets is helpful.

The elements of reading and writing is the tool for the child and we should set him to using it. The main thing is worthy material and worthy ends. The office of the child-imagination is to make real that which is apparent only. As the mother guides the child, so the teacher, in place of the mother, ought to lead the child for she brings to her aid a great company of invisible spirits, interpreters to her and to the child of the sure things of heaven and earth.

The law elucidated is the law of imaginative development. Shall our system follow this law when we put the child into the hands of innumerable teachers—books? What shall *they say* "when they talk"?

The supreme endowment of human nature is imagination, for it is the capacity for creation. In the exercise of it man is like to his Creator. The scientist, the historian, the statesman is helpless without its exercise. By it the poet, the dramatist, the novelist, from things seen, reflected in the depths of things unseen, reconstructs a world of beauty, order, and law.

The child-imagination is appealed to by the dweller in the ideal world. The child believes more than he sees. Give him not trash but literature, which is the rich deposit of the centuries, and which shall, from its simplicity, reliance on elemental truths of the soul, and other excellent qualities, appeal surely to his imagination. The growth of this supreme power is not at the expense of understanding, of reasoning, and of practical sense, for these are yet latent; but it is stimulating to their full development later. The highest success is to be found in following nature's footsteps. The educational law is summed up in this:

Give to the child, as soon as he has mastered the rudiments of reading, some form of great imaginative literature, and continue year after year to set large works before him until he has completed his school course. I repeat that, apart from the lower use as a means of acquiring information in geography, history, or science, the educational law of reading lies in a steady presentation to the growing mind of those works of art in literature which are the glory of the nation, and have an undying power to feed the imagination. Exclude the indifferent and ignoble: choose whatsoever is pure, noble, and inspiring. Open the gates wider and wider into the kingdom of the ideal and let literature bring its own lessons of honor, truth, righteousness, and heavenly beauty.

Literature must not be turned into distasteful lessons. Remember a by-law of our educational law of reading is that, up to the final stage, reading is to be unaccompanied by analysis. Let there be some notes, explanations of obscurities, and talk leading to enjoyment of what is read, but always know that reading is for *delight*, for the *enrichment* of the *soul*. The imagination is still increasing its power; the time for criticism, for analysis, is not yet. Reading, under our law, is a great and fundamental contribution to the intellectual and spiritual growth of the person and fraught with the highest good to his later years. There is no doubt that between six and sixteen a large part of the best literature may be read, and that the man or woman who fails to become acquainted with great literature during that time is little likely to have a taste formed later.

What is the educational law of writing and how do reading and writing stand to each other?

The childish flights of imagination are expressed not in words but through play. The vocabulary is limited but the play of the imagination is great. Do not deny force of imagination to the child because it does not voice its images. How vast, however, now is the gulf between the child's power of appropriation through reading, and his power of expression through speech and writing.

The first speech of children is imitative. It is clear that we must always give the child the best and purest models, and how helpful it is when, year after year, we permit the boy and girl to listen to and commune with the masters of English speech. Little by little they will perceive the difference between the unsullied English of the great writers and the uncultured English of the ordinary newspaper. So the pupil who has read steadily in the writings of those who use the English tongue with grace and strength has an immense advantage in acquiring not only taste for good literature but a power also of expressing himself in honest English. The power of appreciation, of appropriation, is strongest in these growing years; the power of expression is in

its infancy and its growth is far slower. Do not expect a child to reproduce the inimitable language of a classic. Let him rather copy gems of prose and poetry for their unconscious effect.

The last step in the development of the imagination and the reason—critical analysis—is reserved for college and university. Consider now the order of nature: first, familiarity with the great art of letters in youth; then the turning of the matured powers of reasoning upon this accumulation for the purpose of ascertaining the sources of beauty; finally the mysterious blending of the critical and the creative faculties.

W. Carleton Tift

FOREIGN NOTES

ENGLAND.

The Schoolmaster (London) Dec. 16, 1893.

Secondary Education—A Commission to be Appointed.—In the House of Commons, Friday, December 8, Mr. Benson asked the vice-president whether he has considered the views expressed at the Conference on Secondary Education, which was held at Oxford in October last at the invitation of the vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford; and whether the government proposes to take any action in the matter.

Mr. Acland: The government have carefully considered the views expressed at the important Conference on Secondary Education at Oxford, at which the representatives of many educational bodies were present, and they have determined, in accordance with the opinions repeatedly expressed at that conference, to advise the appointment of a royal commission to make recommendations as to the best methods of organising secondary education in England, and on other matters.

The Forthcoming Commission on Secondary Education.—The government has taken the only course open to it, in connection with the problem of organising Secondary Education. No doubt the delay necessary to the deliberations of a commission will irritate Mr. Acland sadly, but even he will come to see in time that the best interests of a democratic system of state secondary schools will be best promoted by delay just now. Not only do we want a careful inquiry into the needs of the country, and the extent to which those needs have already been met; but we want this also, that there shall be no mistake about the absolute essentiality of putting all forms of state education under one and the same central, and—in each